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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, April 20, 1933.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Guides to Judging Qualities of Canned Vegetables." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Homemakers, something new is happening in the field of food buying. I think it is worth knowing. Here are the facts, as given us by Wells A. Sherman, in charge of the fruit and vegetable division of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics:

"A number of vegetable canners have decided to put statements on their labels which will show you exactly the grade of the goods in the can. We think that will make history. A can label will mean more than it ever meant before. Nearly all of us buy some canned vegetables and some of us would buy more if we were sure that we knew what grade we were getting.

"Now let us understand clearly that the Food and Drugs Act requires all canned vegetables to be clean and wholesome. So, when we discuss differences in market quality or grade, we are not talking about the difference between clean products and unclean products or between wholesome products and unwholesome products. We are talking about those differences which make you willing to pay more for one wholesome product than for another wholesome product. Canned peas and canned corn are wholesome even when the stock was so mature when canned that it had lost its original sweetness. While these mealy or starchy peas and corn kernels are still wholesome and nutritious they are not so appetizing as those which are canned when younger and more tender. We ought not to pay as much for them and we ought to know which cans contain the older and tougher corn or peas and which contain those at exactly the right time.

"Likewise, in canning tomatoes it may be possible to put up a pack in which every tomato is fully ripe, smooth, and free from decay, so that it was easy to remove all the skin.

"A change in the weather may cause growth cracks around the stem of almost every tomato in the field only a week later, and in order to use these tomatoes before decay starts in these cracks, they may be picked when the shoulder is still hard and green. The grade of the product finally placed in the can may be almost equal to the Grade A which can be prepared only from stock which is nearly perfect, but the color is not likely to be quite so deep red and the tomatoes will not be so nearly whole. Here we might, however, have a Grade B, or an article midway between the Standard Grade and the Fancy.

"But if the workmanship is not of the best we shall find in the can some pieces of skin and light colored pieces of tomato, or possibly whole tomatoes showing light colored flesh on the shoulder, or possibly some of the white core

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tissue which runs in from the stem toward the center of the tomato. Such tomatoes when poured out may have a somewhat spotted appearance, the general color rather light red instead of dark, with small pieces of skin and light colored pieces of flesh which anyone can see. These are Standard, or Grade C, tomatoes, and probably a majority of all the tomatoes packed in the United States are of this grade.

"A canned vegetable which for any reason falls below the minimum requirement of Standard must be marked 'Sub-Standard,' this quality being expressed on vegetables by the words 'Below U. S. Standard - Low Quality but not Illegal.' Now, you will see that since the Sub-Standard goods must be marked as such or be subject to seizure under the Food and Drugs Act. If the canners will mark their two higher grades 'Grade A' and 'Grade B' the buyer may assume that any can which is not marked Grade A or Grade B and which does not carry the Sub-Standard statement is of Grade C, or Standard quality. Some manufacturers will no doubt print Grade C on the label just as many of them are now using the word 'Standard.'

"It would take me too long to tell you just what the differences are between Grade A, Grade B, and Grade C for each of our canned vegetables and you could not possibly remember them if I told you over the radio. But these grades have all been described in plain language which anyone can understand, and any of you who wish to buy canned vegetables more intelligently and come nearer getting the exact worth of your money than you have been able to do before, should write to the United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for copies of these grades. We have tried our best to base these grades on exactly those qualities which distinguish the better from the poorer in the judgment of the consumer. Grades for fresh fruits and vegetables must almost always be based upon the judgment and preference of the wholesaler. He is the one who buys the unopened shipping package. But grades for canned goods are intended to be based strictly and solely upon the qualities which consumers are willing to pay for. They are the people who open the cans.

"Just now there are hundreds of thousands of cases of canned vegetables coming on the market labeled Grade A (Fancy), Grade B (Extra Standard), or Grade C (Standard), most of which were put up by eastern canners. If your grocer does not have them, tell him about them. Let him know that you want to buy canned vegetables labeled with a plain statement of grade. He can get them if he insists on it. If he has any trouble getting them now there will be even more of them next year. Remember this: the labels are usually not put on the cans until just before they are shipped to the jobber or retailer. That is one reason why labels are usually so clean and bright. So the number of cans labeled with a plain statement of grade can increase very rapidly when all of us begin to ask for them.

"Long before the cans are labeled the canner may have sent our office samples of each lot for grading and may have received certificates which show him exactly what grade he may safely print on his labels. There need be no guesswork about this, and if any of you buy canned vegetables labeled Grade A or Grade B or Standard which do not meet the requirements of these grades the Food and Drug Administration of this Department will be glad to know about it.

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"Now, I want to say again that I am sure you will find our grade specifications for canned vegetables of very great interest. If you don't think they are right we want your criticism. In any case we want you to send for copies of the grades of each of the canned vegetables which are used in your homes.

I feel sure that a good many of you will want to send to the United States Department of Agriculture for copies of the grades of canned vegetables which Mr. Sherman told you about in the statement I have just given you on new guides to judging the quality of canned vegetables.

Tomorrow: "Inexpensive Sunday Dinner."

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